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One Hundred Eighth Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Select Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

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Democratic Deputy Staff Director

January 29, 2004

Honorable Jim Turner
Ranking Minority Member
House Select Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Jim:

You and I have worked closely to build the infrastructure for a dedicated Committee on Homeland Security to authorize and oversee the programs and policies of the Department of Homeland Security. In everything we have done -- by way of legislation, oversight, field hearings, classified briefings, and Washington-based Committee hearings -- we have put the country first, and partisanship second.

That studious avoidance of politicizing our nation's security is now being abandoned in favor of quick-trigger partisanship. Twice in the last few weeks -- most recently today -- the minority has issued "reports" which represent neither the work product of our Committee, nor the high standard of quality that has heretofore typified the work of both majority and minority. In both cases the finished document has been simultaneously released to the press, and to me. The Department has not been allowed even the most minimal review to check for blatant errors. There has been an utter abandonment of the normal bipartisan procedures to allow fact-checking and comment, which are essential for maintaining the professional integrity of the Committee's work product. Had our staff been able to review the minority document, I am absolutely certain you would have accepted several of the suggestions and corrections that would have been offered.

Bipartisan cooperation is absolutely necessary for an additional reason: If the Congress is to conduct aggressive oversight of the Department, we cannot be divided. As you know, the Committee has scheduled hearings on a wide range of issues that we both believe needed to be examined. The Committee's members on both sides of the aisle have diligently pursued perceived weaknesses in our developing homeland security initiatives and their implementation. The presumption that resorting to minority-only tactics is needed is without foundation, and indeed potentially damaging to our national effort.

The tenor of today's "report" is harshly political and partisan. Its breathlessness, in place

of analysis and rigor, weakens the legitimacy and reputation of our Committee.

I am particularly concerned by the developing trend represented by these two recent exercises in policy-by-press release because, as the Ranking Minority Member, you have not expressed to me any of the concerns highlighted in today's broadside. I write because I do not wish our joint oversight effort to descend further into the well-worn rut of partisanship. There is simply no reason, Jim, to think that by working together we could not do a better job of oversight in this area, as in all others affecting homeland security.

The better path for our Committee is clear: Follow the example of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and the Committee on Armed Services, and work collegially for the good of the country. Where we must diverge, there is an unlimited opportunity for the expression of minority and dissenting views. The nation, the Department, and our colleagues and professional staff deserve the benefit of the presumption that we are all on the same side in this fight.

Sincerely,

Christopher Cox
Chairman